

writing group can be very helpful. As we saw from Janice's experience, creative writing can uncover tricky thoughts, feelings, and memories that you might want to share with others. Others can also help to clarify issues and discover new possibilities not thought of before. I hope it will not intrude if I offer my own thoughts on creative writing. In difficult times, I tend towards reading rather than writing and like the poetry of Adrienne Rich. Her poetic language can and does keep body and soul together.

Maureen Cavill

Life and Death in Freud and Heidegger

Havi Carel. (2006). Rodopi. £34.29.

Havi Carel's book...

...provides a framework for understanding death as an active force within life. It presents an account of death as a non-pathological moment structuring life and shows that constructing a reflexive attitude to death is central to understanding life. This view rejects the dichotomy detaching the two and proposes to re-introduce death into life to create a unified view of life and death.

(p. xix)

Carel accomplishes this goal, but only by doing exegetical damage to both Freud and Heidegger. What emerges is therefore not a proper interpretation of either author, but instead a wholesale restructuring of both bodies of work into something that is fairly original. In the end, we thus cannot look to Carel as providing a pair of faithful interpretations. We can, however, attempt to understand Carel's work as an original contribution to the role of death within life.

As such a work, it boils down to some fairly unoriginal theses argued in a fairly original way: death has a role to play within life; death structures life; life and death are not dichotomous, but are inextricably connected. All of this can be easily granted by a reader steeped in Freud and/or Heidegger. Indeed, both authors clearly argue for likeminded theses. In Freud's case the thesis is presented in the form of the death drive. In Heidegger's case it is presented in the context of being-towards-death.

In this review I will support my claim that Carel's exegeses are at best incomplete and at worst incorrect. I will also argue that the exegetical failures are of little relevance to the contribution made by the work's third part, which is – on my reading – the best part of the book. I'll take these tasks in the above order.

A useful starting point in evaluating the present pair of exegeses lies in understanding the radical differences in motivation between the two authors. Freud is interested in understanding man and his putative

pathologies; Heidegger is interested in understanding Being. Freud's aim generates a psychological and sociological jargon centred on drives; Heidegger's jargon is original to the task at hand in *Being and Time* (BT): it is an attempt to understand how the being that questions its own being relates to Being, a task that is preliminary to understanding the question of Being in general and hopefully eventually answering that same question. Because of these broad incongruencies of aim, it is difficult to imagine how the two authors could be brought together except in an ad-hoc, arbitrary fashion. Such an effort, however, undermines Heidegger's apodictic approach and thus cannot hope to achieve a conciliation between the two authors, at least not one that remains within each writer's principal framework.

At times Carel's argument is confused: for example, it attempts to show that the uncanny (*das Unheimliche*) is not an integral part of anxiety (p.166), but then proceeds to give examples of the uncanny that are not rooted in anxiety (it's quite possible for the uncanny to not be "an integral part of anxiety" and yet for there to be examples that are not rooted in anxiety, a simple point that nonetheless appears to escape Carel's attention). This is not just a minor error, for Carel is attempting to show that the uncanny can be separated from anxiety in order to demonstrate the broader point that anxiety is not the only "affective state" that can disclose the world to Dasein. This, in turn, is a step towards Carel's conclusion that anxiety is not the only route to authenticity, which Carel takes to be an ethically-relevant concept within Heidegger's framework.

There is much that I find wrong in this analysis of BT, but perhaps one key element will serve to unravel the intricate and learned interpretation that Carel has erected: the concept of authenticity was explicitly *non-ethical* and *neutral* so far as Heidegger was concerned. Carel, on the other hand, insists on seeing ethical significance in authenticity and inauthenticity. This leads to a reading of *Being and Time* in which Dasein's inauthenticity is something to be fixed, a pathology that can be remedied by – for example – psychoanalysis. This opens the path to an examination of Freud's analyses of these same concepts (anxiety, the uncanny, self-knowledge) and allows Carel to weave together an interesting theory that can be attributed to both Freud and Heidegger, thus making it seem as if what we have here is a true synthesis of the two bodies of work. In the end, Carel claims to have constructed a theory wherein an "unconscious acknowledgement of one's own death is possible" and which can then be used to repair Dasein's inauthenticity by allowing for a non-anxious and authentic relationship to death and – by extension – to life. Along the way Freudian repression is made synonymous with Heideggerian inauthenticity. The proper fix is to undo repression and inauthenticity in one fell swoop by using the death of another to mediate an unconscious acknowledgement of our own death. In this context, inauthentic Dasein is said to contain an

unconscious element, a ‘*space*’ that contains the ‘*covered up material*’ that must be deposited somewhere when Dasein covers up its authentic self-understanding when immersing itself in *das Man* (p. 176).

But the alleged synthesis comes at a huge exegetical price: Freud is turned into a metaphysician, which he explicitly and repeatedly claimed not to be; Heidegger is turned into an ethicist, which he explicitly and repeatedly claimed not to be (not merely in BT but more notably and forcefully in the ‘*Letter on Humanism*’).

Furthermore, Dasein is turned into just another word for ‘*person*’. There is a good reason for thinking of *Dasein* as not merely another word for ‘*person*’, however (and this serves as an important lesson for all attempts to bring together psychoanalysis and fundamental ontology): Heidegger’s chief interest was in understanding the distinction between Being and beings. As such, the choice of *there-being* (the literal translation of ‘*dasein*’) was made in order to select the most thin and least presumptive understanding of human existence that is possible: that whatever else human beings are, they understand themselves to be distinct beings set apart from other beings and from ‘*the world*’. It is this thin conception of human existence that is crucial to the ontological side of BT, and by understanding Dasein as synonymous with human persons – with all the attendant psychological baggage that persons have – is to do serious violence to the phenomenological starting point that is supposed to yield to an ontological investigation about the meaning of the question of Being. Indeed, Heidegger himself warns the reader to not take his use of *Dasein* as anthropological or psychological: he titles one of his sections ‘*How the Analytic of Dasein is to be Distinguished from Anthropology, Psychology, and Biology*’ (Sec. 10). A more explicit repudiation of the ground for Carel’s project could not be stated.

At this point a reader of this review might wonder why this is important. Exegetical liberty is often necessary in order to craft a new theory and advance philosophy (and existential analysis, for that matter) beyond its historical underpinnings. There’s no doubt that this is the case, but a book titled *Life and Death in Freud and Heidegger* ought to aim for exegetical correctness and clarity. If the book were to cast itself as using the two authors as an impetus for a new theory of life and death, the liberties taken would be not merely excusable but welcome. But by trying to be a work in Freudian and Heideggerian studies the reader of the book must take a distinctly different attitude: he must wonder whether the interpretations are correct in addition to asking whether the new theory is cogent.

We can nonetheless ignore the exegetical flaws and assess the new theory of death offered by Carel. To this task I now turn.

Carel attempts to show that death and life are not dichotomous and that death ought to be seen as a structuring element within life. Heidegger attempts the same thing, but for Carel Heidegger’s approach – rooted in

angst and in other “negative” concepts such as inauthenticity, falling prey, and fleeing – is much too pessimistic. Freud’s own apparent pessimism is likewise problematic for Carel – what is needed is an approach to death that avoids such a pessimism but which does not simply cover over what is important in death: transience, loss, and finitude. As Carel writes:

...it is not only through anxiety that one encounters death, but that opposite experiences of beauty and love are inherently transient and therefore confront us with finitude. Everything beautiful and cherished contains the kernel of its destruction in its transience. We therefore have an ambivalent attitude towards these experiences and objects. This ambivalence links love and hate, beauty and transience, life and death, a link that stands at the basis of the unified view. (P. 187).

The unified view of death as constructive of life emerges, Carel argues, from the meeting of the two “humanist” disciplines of philosophy and psychoanalysis. In this light, the book is in part an effort to bring philosophy back to its Socratic and therapeutic roots. As such, it belongs to the same tradition as does Jonathan Lear’s work, to name but one other proponent of the Socratic view and its connection to Freud.

The book is well-written: its sentences are crisp, clear, and concise for a book that deals with an extremely dense subject matter. Freud and Heidegger are not natural bed-fellows, however, and in this work we see several cleavages which are knowledgeably traversed by Carel but which expose the radically different aims of each author. Ultimately, this dooms the book’s overall project to failure, as it becomes clear quite early in the exposition of the project that doing justice to either one of these authors does a great disservice to the other. If we decide to avoid those exegetical difficulties, instead focusing on Carel’s own aims, then we find ourselves with too little substance to make a comprehensive and informed assessment of its merits. It’s not to be recommended as an introduction to either author, but as an exemplar of what happens when one tries to marry two incongruous systems of thought it is an instructive exercise in futility and thus has the capacity to teach us something about both Freud and Heidegger in spite of the aforementioned flaws.

Fabio Escobar

Dreaming Arrival

John Welch. (2008). Shearsman Books. £11.95.

In *Dreaming Arrival* John Welch reflects on (his) life, his experience of psychotherapy and the process of writing. Welch’s text offers many interesting insights, observations and reflections on the experience of one man’s being in his world. It is a fascinating and absorbing read for many reasons and in many ways. However, there are three features of the book,